

PLATE I.—THE HORSLEY CHILDREN From the picture
in the possession of Messrs. Thos. Agnew & Sons. (Frontispiece)

Few painters have rivalled Romney in expressing the simplicity and naïveté of children. These portraits of Master George and Miss Charlotte Horsley are excellent examples of his mastery of an artless pose, and of the reticence of his colour. How delightfully the flowers tell against the white dresses.



ROMNEY

BY C. LEWIS HIND ◉ ◉ ◉
ILLUSTRATED WITH EIGHT
REPRODUCTIONS IN COLOUR



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CHAPTER I

THREE PERIODS OF ROMNEY'S LIFE

HIGH over the western boundary of Cavendish Square rose a tripod wooden scaffolding, supporting a gigantic crane cutting the arch of the sky; on windy days the smoke from the engine was blown upwards into space. Below, twentieth-century mansions were growing

on the site of old Harcourt House, for Cavendish Square, like the rest of London, was suffering an architectural change into something strange and new.

Some of the eighteenth-century houses remain, and as I sought No. 32, in the early summer of 1907, I wondered if this dwelling of memories had escaped the builder. Abundant memories! Into that house, through the later years of the eighteenth century, passed the flower of English loveliness, breeding, valour, brains, wit and frailty. For this was Romney's house, with the large painting-room at the back, which he, greatly daring, rented in 1775, to the satisfaction of the landlord, whose property had been untenanted since the death of Francis Cotes, R.A., five years before. Soon the great Sir Joshua showed signs of Olympian jealousy at the success of the raw man from the North, reserved, silent, moody, whose acquaintance with the *beau monde* did not go beyond his studio door; who worked by night on designs for "great or heroic art," and who had a genius for fixing the fleeting loveliness of a woman's face so simply and fragrantly that we liken a fine Romney to

PLATE II — SKETCH PORTRAIT OF LADY HAMILTON
(From the picture in the National Gallery)

Her rich brown hair falls in tempestuous disorder over a pillow ; the mouth is open , the eyes are as near to tragedy as the volatile Emma could go This sketch (circular, 1 ft. 6 in.) was presented to the National Gallery in 1898.



a rosebud arranged in a pattern of artless leaves.

Sir Joshua, at work in Leicester Square, realised that the stream of fashion flowing to his studio had been diverted. He did not refer to Romney by name! He merely called him "the man in Cavendish Square," and be sure that some candid friend repeated to him Thurlow's public declaration: "The town is divided between Reynolds and Romney; I belong to the Romney faction."

If you think that plain-speech Thurlow exaggerated, glance at the verbatim transcript of Romney's Diaries, giving the names and appointments of his sitters, printed in the monumental work by Mr. Humphry Ward and Mr. W. Roberts. In less than twenty years over nine thousand sittings in the house in Cavendish Square are recorded.

If the stones of Cavendish Square had language! To No. 32 came Warren Hastings, Burke, Thurlow, Garrick, John Wesley, lords and ladies innumerable, the two lovely Ramus girls, the beautiful Mrs. Lee Acton, Mrs. Mark Currie, Mrs. "Perdita" Robinson, and the adorable

Miss Vernon. Other men seek elation in wine, or spring, in Mozart or Grieg; Romney found it in the flash of a new face, "lit with the shock of eager eyes." Thither came the pretty Gower, Clavering, Warwick, and Horsley children, and one day in 1782 that "divine lady" Emma, when Romney was forty-eight. In she floated, laughter in her eyes, joy on her lips, sunshine in her presence—shadowed by her cavalier, Charles Greville, whose emotions were as precisely under control as running motor to a chauffeur. Thus joy entered into his life, and joy left him, when, nine years later, he painted Emma for the last time after her marriage to Sir William Hamilton. The syren having departed he was soon to be on his way—a broken man, still ambitious but ineffectual—to the arms of deserted Griselda, patiently awaiting her faithless husband in Kendal.

Having reached this point in my meditations, I came abreast of No. 32, and found a brand-new, pleasing house, without tablet or bust. Sir Joshua marched conquering to the goal: Romney fell before the last lap. I paced the square and thought of his life that has given im-

mortality to so many. The eighteenth century is vocal on the canvases of her great painters. The other day I saw the two Ramus girls smiling from a wall in a house by Henley-on-Thames, and they seemed more alive than the goggled, huddled women—that had just flashed along the highroad in a motor car. And as I mused by the trees in Cavendish Square, dominated by that vast crane—the sign-mark of new London—cutting the sky, I saw clearly the three periods of Romney's life symbolised by a *Horse*, a *House*, and the words *Home Again*

THE HORSE

It is March 14, 1762. George Romney, aged twenty-eight, mounts his nag at Kendal and rides forth, with fifty pounds in his saddle-bags, to seek fame and fortune as a painter in London. Nothing matters but his career. Doubtless he is sure—or as sure as an emotional, impressionable man, taking his colour from his surroundings, but conscious of great powers, can be—that when his pockets are full of guineas, he will send

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for Mary and the children ; but that is all vague. He knows, if he does not confess it to himself, that he has outgrown the pretty, patient creature he married seven years before, after she had nursed him through fever in his Kendal lodgings. As he rides he recalls his early days in the farmhouse at Beckside : his versatile father—farmer, cabinet-maker, draughtsman, and a dozen other things ; his affection for Williamson, watch-maker and musician ; the influence of Christopher Steele—"itinerant dauber" ; his stay in York, where he saw Sterne ; the first picture he painted—a hand holding a letter for the post-office at Kendal ; the portraits he produced at two guineas for a head and six guineas for a whole length ; then more success, and finally that lottery of his unsold works at the Kendal Town Hall, eighty-two tickets at half-a-guinea each. The proceeds, added to his savings, made him master of a hundred guineas. Half went to Mary ; and here he is, with the other fifty in his saddle-bags, a free man, jogging towards London. Somehow he will find the intricate key to fame. But first he must seek a lodging. He scans bewildering London, puts up at the Castle Inn, and a fort-

night later moves to Dove Court, near the Poultry end of Cheapside.

THE HOUSE

It is March 27, 1776—fourteen years have passed. Romney is in his Cavendish Square house waiting for the first sitter recorded in his Diaries—"Lord Parker at 9 o'clock." Two more are to follow that day, "Miss Vernon at half-past 10," and "Lady Betty Compton at $\frac{1}{4}$ to 2." Seven more are booked for the three following days, and on Sunday he expects "At two a lady." He is well pleased. Fame is at his elbow. Fourteen busy years have glided by since his nag first clattered on the Cheapside cobbles. He has painted many pictures, always believing that "heroic art" is his forte, and portraits merely a means of living, and he has refused to exhibit at the Royal Academy, holding that public competition is bad for a man with "aspen nerves, shy, private, studious, and contemplative." In those fourteen years the *gauche* north countryman has seen something of the world. He has

visited Paris, and he has made a tour lasting two years and three months through Italy, without which the education of an eighteenth-century painter was considered incomplete. Troubles he has had, of course. There was that cruel affair of the Society of Arts' competition, in which his picture of "The Death of Wolfe" won the prize; but the award of fifty guineas was, for some mysterious reason, withdrawn, and he had to be content with a consolation gift. Romney believes that Reynolds had a hand in it; but that is hard to credit. Italy and success and the Cavendish Square venture have blotted out that early disappointment. Taking Francis Cotes' large house was a bold step, and it had been complicated, at the critical moment, by an offer from Lord Warwick to visit Warwick Castle and paint a companion to the "very respectable portraits, chiefly by Vandyke, collected by the Earl." Romney refused that tempting offer (he painted the family group later), determined to let nothing delay the Cavendish Square plunge. How well it has turned out! Like Sir Joshua he has begun a Diary of his sitters. The hands of the clock point to nine. It is time Lord Parker

arrived. And at half-past ten, joy! he will be shyly welcoming the beautiful Miss Vernon. The image of Mary, in the far-away north, is very faint.

HOME AGAIN

More than twenty years have passed. The Cavendish Square house is let to Sir Martin Archer Shee: Romney has given up portrait painting, and in the Hampstead studio purposes to devote himself to heroic art and win immortality with his Miltonic subjects. But his health grows worse. The game is up. Oppressed, conscious of numbness in his hand and a swimming in his head, chagrined at the muddled failure of his building experiments at Holly Bush Hill, Hampstead—that “whimsical structure covering half the garden,”—where some of his pictures were destroyed by weather and others stolen, he longs only for peace and escape from himself. Yet how triumphant has been the course of those twenty years in Cavendish Square. Never throwing off the mask of the recluse, he has made friends after his own kind; he has

moved in the Eartham set which revolved round the orb of the preposterous Hayley. There he met Cowper, and that "elegant female," Miss Seward, the "Swan of Lichfield," who would address him as "beloved and honoured Titiano," or as Raphael, while he would greet her as Sappho; Flaxman, too, he has known, who bought for him in Italy ten large cases of casts—the Laocoon, the Apollo Belvedere, and so on. These the painter would exhibit to his select friends and pupils in his studio at night, a powerful lamp shining down upon the Laöcoon. Then was Romney happy. Away from the distraction of the "new face lit with the shock of eager eyes," he could bemuse himself with the contortions of the Laöcoon, and believe that he was surrounded by the creations of "great art."

PLATE III—MRS. MARK CURRIE.

(From the picture in the National Gallery)

A typical and charming Romney. Miss Elizabeth Close married Mr. Mark Currie on January 18, 1789, and sat to Romney for the first time on the 7th of May in the same year. The painter received sixty guineas for this portrait.



The sun is shining cheerfully in Cavendish Square, and Romney's troubles have been long quieted, forgotten in the pleasure his work gives us. No! I do not feel any sadness in recalling his life. Death pays all debts.

No. 32 looks very spick and span in the bright sunshine, and as I gaze at it I perceive above the tall ground-floor windows two heads of cherubs in stone, just like Sir Joshua's Heads of Angels in the National Gallery. Is it intentional, I wonder? Did the architect of this new house wish subtly to suggest that he, like Lord Thurlow, belonged to the Sir Joshua faction?

Maybe. I don't know, but I shall never pass the house without thinking so. Poor Romney! He hated irony and wit—and irony in stone is more enduring than irony in words or paint.

On another occasion when the Chancellor was asked to subscribe to the Shakespeare that Romney and others were illustrating, he said: "What! is Romney at work for it? He cannot paint in that style; it is out of his way. By God, he'll make a balderdash business of it!" I suspect that it was not altogether artistic convictions that made the Chancellor ally himself to the Romney faction. There was more of the man in Sir Joshua than in Romney; and when Thurlow suggested to Reynolds that Orpheus and Eurydice would be an excellent subject for a series of pictures, Sir Joshua snubbed him. The pliable Romney, when Thurlow broached the idea to him, was delighted. He listened so sympathetically (we can imagine the appreciation in his large liquid eyes) to the Chancellor's translation of the episode from Virgil, that the great man was delighted with his *protégé*, asked him to paint the portraits of his daughters, and

his rival; but Romney, who was a modest man, may be said in his quiet way to have belonged to the Reynolds faction. He is recorded to have said that no man in Europe could have painted such a picture as Reynolds's "Hercules strangling the Serpents"; and when a pupil told him that his picture of Mrs. Siddons was considered superior to Reynolds's portrait, he answered, "The people know nothing of the matter, for it is not."

Romney never sent a picture to the Royal Academy, and consequently his name never came up for election. He seems to have thought that to a man of his excitable temperament it would be better to pursue his art cloistrally and to avoid competition. Hayley encouraged him in this. Romney was his private preserve, and the painter submitted to the ring-fence that his cunning friend built about him.

In 1781 the town may have been divided between Reynolds and Romney, but posterity has a clear idea of the rank of the masters of eighteenth-century portraiture. Ahead of all stand Reynolds and Gainsborough, followed at no great distance by the virile Raeburn; Romney

PLATE IV —THE PARSONS DAUGHTER A Portrait.
(From the picture in the National Gallery)

This dainty portrait was called "The Parsons Daughter" by her owner. Romney must have enjoyed the brief task of painting her. She gave him no trouble, you may be sure. Easily and gracefully he suggested the powdered hair framing the face marked in demureness, the long neck springing from the shoulders, and the note of green in the auburn curls.

or excused his marital conduct. Mary seems to have made no complaint. She knew George and understood him, knew that he had ceased to care for her, and that his art held, and would always hold, chief place in his affections. I am not tempted to play the part of moralist. Romney's niche in the Temple of Fame is as painter, not as husband. Tennyson treated the domestic side in his poem "Romney's Remorse." The painter, according to the bard—

". . . made
The wife of wives a widow bride, and lost
Salvation for a sketch."

Edward Fitzgerald, a bachelor, observes in one of his letters: "When old, nearly mad, and quite desolate, he went back to her, and she received him and nursed him till he died. This quiet act of hers is worth all Romney's pictures; even as a matter of Art, I am sure."

Romney supported his wife, no great tax on a man who made nearly £4000 in one year, and he paid her two or three visits in the course of his triumphant career. The ugly part of the story is that he posed in London as a bachelor.

PLATE IV —THE PARSONS DAUGHTER A Portrait.
(From the picture in the National Gallery)

This dainty portrait was called "The Parson's Daughter" by a former owner. Romney must have enjoyed the brief task of painting her. She gave him no trouble, you may be sure. Easily as a thrush sings he suggested the powdered hair framing the coquettish face masked in demureness, the long neck springing from the slight frame, and the note of green in the auburn curls.



Shy, something of a recluse, impressionable, with delicate perceptions that made him a favourite among women, he was a man of good physical strength and robust appearance. According to Cumberland, he talked well. His harangues on art were "uttered in a hurried accent, an elevated tone, and very commonly accompanied by tears, to which he was by constitution prone." We are also informed that a noble sentiment never failed to make his eyes to overflow and his voice to tremble.

The early biographies of Romney were written to counteract one another. Hayley's foolish volume of 1809 was composed to correct the "coarse representation" of Cumberland, which was published in the *European Magazine*. Cumberland was a sensible man, and he wrote well. The useful but too appreciative volume by his son, John Romney, was a counterblast to Hayley. Later lives have been George Paston's admirable study, and the indispensable *Catalogue Raisonné* by Mr. W. Roberts, with a *biographical and critical essay* by Mr. Humphry Ward, which also includes the text of Romney's

Diaries from 1776 to 1795, acquired at Miss Romney's sale in 1894.

Romney lived in an age when men and women of sensibility wrote poems of praise to one another. Cowper's is perhaps the best known.

"But this I mark, that symptoms none of woe
In thy incomparable work appear."

It is poor stuff; but better than the effusions of Hayley, Miss Seward, and John Halliday.

CHAPTER III

VICISSITUDES OF FAME

TO-DAY—one hundred and five years after his death—no millionaire's gallery is complete without a Romney, and the desire to possess a fine example grows fiercer yearly.

Doubtless, the purchasers at public auction in 1896 of the "Ladies Caroline and Elizabeth Spencer," in white and red dresses, for £10,500, and, in 1902, of Miss Sarah Rodbard fondling a Skye terrier curled up upon a stone pedestal, for the same price, were well content with their bargains. Romney received £84 apiece for these pictures. His "Lady Hamilton as Nature," which was bought by Mr. Fawkes of Farnley, Turner's friend, for 50 guineas in 1816 was resold after the Grafton Exhibition for, it is said, 20,000 guineas. The picture is now in Paris.

The witchery of his portraits of dainty dolls,

the sweet composure of his young matrons, the charm of his children, the delicacy of his presentments of men, such as the "Wesley" and the "Warren Hastings," captivate the unlearned as well as connoisseurs. The appeal of his gift for expressing momentary loveliness is instantaneous. He was a poet in paint to a far greater degree than the so-called poets of the Earham set were in words. No problem is offered; the freshness of the flower-like faces is stated simply and without hint of cleverness. The reticent colour lingers on sash or ribbon, and beneath the powdered fair hair the rose and cream tints of these pretty mondaines bloom like the petals of carnations against the light. So virginal are the typical Romney ladies, that it is almost a shock to read that some of the portraits were never paid for, because the bright creatures had been passed on from the protector who gave the commission for the portrait. John Romney found a neat phrase when he said that his father "could impart to his female figures that indescribable something—that *je ne sais quoi*—which captivates the spectator without his being able to account for it."

PLATE V.—LADY WITH A CHILD (From the picture
in the National Gallery)

The dark blue eyes of the child gaze out upon the world in reposeful wonder. The pose is delightfully natural. Romney's genius for design never failed him when his subject was a girl, a mother and child, or a group of children at play.



Strange it is that until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Romney revival began, fostered by the "Old Masters' Exhibitions" and auction sales, his fame had suffered an almost total eclipse. His portraits were hidden in private collections, the National Gallery set had not been acquired, and nobody cared about his heroic and historical cartoons and studies, at Cambridge and elsewhere.

The eclipse of the fame of Romney is no doubt partly due to the fact that he never exhibited at the Royal Academy, which in those days meant that "outsiders," so far as the public was concerned, were truly in outer darkness. When Romney retired from contact with the fashionable world, with which he never associated himself except as a painter; when he forsook his disastrous building experiments at Hampstead, for the living death (of his later years) at Kendal, he passed out of public life. His portraits ceased to be a topic. There were no weekly art columns in newspapers to fan the embers of his fame; the National Gallery was not founded, and the age of illustrated essays on private collections had not dawned.

of exaggeration and emphasis, it has all the vices of the melodramatic heroic pictures of the period.

Romney had some talent as a musician, and as a boy he debated whether he should be a musician or a painter. Cumberland records that once he heard the painter perform on his own home-made violin in a room hung with his own pictures—"a singular coincidence of arts in the person of one man."

Reviewing his life, I seem to see him drawing, like Paganini on a memorable occasion, exquisite strains from one string only—Romney of the one string—a fantasia on the beauty of fair and fragile women, pretty and graceful children, and delicate-visaged men, the sweetest sounds coming when he extemporised in praise of Emma, the "divine lady" who came into his life when he was forty-eight, and who renewed his youth.

CHAPTER IV

HIS PORTRAITS IN PUBLIC GALLERIES

THE National Gallery possesses in "Mrs. Mark Currie," purchased in 1897, a typical and charming Romney. The pose, the reticent colour, the simplicity of the design, the background landscape, all please the eye. There is no sign of the labour that he bestowed upon his Shakespearean picture of "The Tempest," that formidable enterprise, containing eighteen figures, which was pruned and extended to meet suggestions of his friends.

Mrs. Mark Currie sits demurely self-conscious, as his quick eyes saw her in the first impressionistic glance, artfully clad in a simple muslin dress, relieved by the pale crimson sash and the ribbons of the same colour that nestle in fichu and sleeves. The fair hair is powdered; the large eyes gaze from the soft oval face conscious of, and content with, its comeliness;

face, the long neck springing from the slight body and the note of green in the auburn curls.

Country cousins who visit the National Gallery always pause before his "Lady with a Child," attracted by the naturalness of the little one, whose dark blue eyes gaze with reposeful wonder at the spectator, and by the clarity of the paint. Romney's genius for design rarely failed him when his subject was a girl, a mother and child, or children at play, such as the buoyant group of the little Gower family dancing in a ring. To realise how hard and tight his handling could be when not inspired by his subject, look at the early "Portraits of Mr. and Mrs. William

PLATE VI.—MRS. ROBINSON—"PERDITA." (From the
picture in the Wallace Collection)

Hanging on the same wall in the Wallace Collection as Reynolds's seaward-gazing "*Mrs. Robinson*" and Gainsborough's superb full length, Romney's portrait of the famous lady is put to a severe test. Nevertheless, this small picture of "*Perdita*," with a muff, dressed for walking, looks very charming.



dog; the sleekness of the skin, and the characteristic sagacity of the animal are so well depicted as to give it the appearance of reality."

Neither is the remaining Romney in the National Gallery, "Portrait of Lady Craven," a first-rate example, although it has its own sedate and simple charm. This oval once hung in the breakfast-room at Strawberry Hill, and inspired Horace Walpole to compose the following lines:—

"Full many an artist has on canvas fix'd
All charms that Nature's pencil ever mix'd—
The witchery of Eyes, the Grace that tips
The inexpressible *douceur* of Lips.
Romney alone, in this fair image caught
Each Charm's expression and each Feature's thought;
And shows how in their sweet assemblage sit,
Taste, spirit, softness, sentiment and wit."

Romney does not shine in the Wallace Collection. His sole example, "Mrs. Robinson," is but a "twinkling star" (his own phrase to express the charms of the greatest beauties of the eighteenth century compared with Lady Hamilton) in the galaxy of masterpieces in the large gallery

at Hertford House. Hanging on the same wall is Reynolds's version of seaward-gazing "Mrs. Robinson," and the superb full length by Gainsborough that dominates the Gallery, quite eclipsing our Romney's modest presentment of the famous lady, dressed for walking, with her hands in a muff. Her high powdered hair is crowned by a cap, the strings of which are tied beneath her plump chin. There is more character and resolution in the face than in the generality of Romney's portraits. Indeed, she is almost matronly, but the complexion has all his rose-leaf freshness; the touch of colour he permits in the sleeve is characteristic.

This room at Hertford House, with its three portraits of Mrs. Robinson, by Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Romney, is the place to brood over and speculate upon the dazzling career of this charming woman. A recital of the facts is enough; imagination can supply the rest. First a *protégé* of Hannah More; then the attraction of the town as "Perdita" at Drury Lane, she dazzled the Prince of Wales and became his mistress. In receipt of a pension of £500 a year at the age of twenty-five, she amused

herself writing novels, poems, and plays, was a member of the Della Cruscan School, and died, "poor and palsied," in 1800 at the age of forty-two.

Among the nine Romneys at the National Portrait Gallery is a winsome and smiling Emma. Her elbows are upon a table, and her firm chin rests upon her hands; but face and hands suffer from an excess of the Romney red. Here also is the crayon sketch of Cowper which inspired the poet's sonnet to Romney, and of which Cowper wrote, "Romney has drawn me in crayons, and, in the opinion of all here, with his best hand and with the most exact resemblance possible"; his friend Richard Cumberland gazing upwards for inspiration; a "Flaxman modelling the Bust of Hayley," an example of "heroic portraiture"; and the Adam Walker family group—the last picture Romney painted, and interesting for its connection with William Blake. In a letter to Hayley, after Romney's death, Blake, who was collecting material for the *Life* by Hayley, wrote in 1804: "He (Adam Walker) showed me also the last performance of Romney. It is of Mr. Walker and his family, the draperies put in by

somebody else. It is an excellent picture, but unfinished."

Unfinished also is the large autograph portrait of himself "as he appeared in the most active season of his existence," painted at Eartham in 1780. "He looks a man of genius" is the comment of visitors to the National Portrait Gallery. Certainly he looks an impressionable, sensitive, and easily moved man, with his large, somewhat mournful eyes and the high brow. Place beside Romney's portrait a photograph of Huxley, and you have two types, poles apart, remote as a Perugino from a Frans Hals.

A noble portrait is that of Warren Hastings at the India Office, everything subservient to the finely-cut head with its fringe of silvery hair, and the dark grey eyes looking shrewdly out at the world. Romney took his colour from his environment. With a lovely woman before him he painted loveliness; confronted by Warren Hastings he painted intellect and power; confronted by a Wesley, intellect and spirituality. But he failed when he tried to imagine something "noble and heroic," such as the melodramatic "Milton Dictating 'Paradise Lost' to

his Daughters," or a story picture such as the replica of "Serena reading 'Evelina' by Candle-light," at the South Kensington Museum. What inspiration could he derive from Hayley's "Triumph of Temper." The personality of Warren Hastings or Charles Wesley could stimulate his genius—not such verses as the following:—

"Sweet Evelina's fascinating power
Had first beguil'd of sleep her midnight hour;
Possesst by Sympathy's enchanting sway
She read, unconscious of the dawning day."

CHAPTER V

PORTRAITS IN PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

THE names of Reynolds, Gainsborough, Raeburn, Romney, and Hoppner are universally known, - and many of their pictures, not always the best examples, are familiar; yet how few Britons have any idea of the chronological life-work of these masters. Their pictures in our public galleries are chance acquisitions, sometimes representative, often mere byways of their achievement.

Romney was an unequal painter. A classification of his achievement in order of merit would begin with the score or so of masterpieces, and dwindle downwards through his good, fair, poor, and bad pictures. There is no other word but bad for such productions as "The Shipwreck" and "The Infant Shakespeare surrounded by the Passions"; and if bad be an unfair description of "Newton Displaying the Prism," it is certainly

a poor picture, although better than "Milton Dictating 'Paradise Lost.'" I have only seen a photograph of "Newton Displaying the Prism," but Redgrave, who examined the picture in the early sixties, describes it as poor in drawing, dirty and hot in colouring, and weak and common-place in treatment.

Romney stands or falls by his portraits and portrait groups, by the score or so of masterpieces that he painted better than he knew. These are the true "great art," the presentment through the eyes of temperament and training of the thing seen, that he was always striving to escape from in his pursuit of a false "great art," which he struggled to approach through the portals of literature guided by other eyes and other brains.

The inequality of Romney was shown at the 1907 Old Masters' Exhibition at Burlington House. In the six contributions from his brush, or ascribed to him, there was one superb example, the second Mrs. Lee Acton; one good example, the first Mrs. Lee Acton, and one bad example, the hard and discordant sketch of Edward Wortley Montagu. The muddy portrait of a "Lady in a



quality in which Romney, at his best, rivalled Gainsborough; and as for her fair powdered hair, I think the secret of its touch-and-go, intimate rendering is now lost. There is hardly any colour in the picture, and yet it is all colour. Time, no doubt, has co-ordinated the glow that enwraps and illuminates this sophisticated Dryad, whose folded hands and arch simper seem to announce that her momentary condescension has given the painter immortality.

Recalling the pleasure that a beautiful Romney such as this gives, and eager to pass on my delight to my friends, I imagine a room hung with reproductions of fine Romneys, where the twentieth century could burn a little incense to the eighteenth-century master. But there must be two rooms, for Lady Hamilton must have a compartment to herself, as in this little book.

The Romneys in the first room would include a reproduction of this "Mrs. Lee Acton" from the collection of Lord de Saumarez; "Mrs. Mark Currie," "The Parson's Daughter," and the "Lady with a Child" from the National Gallery, with "Mrs. Robinson" from the Wallace

should not like to be obliged to choose. The bow of her red lips may be a thought too precise, but how vibrant she is in spite of her composure! how keen and quick the look of that high-bred face! No; I should not like to have to choose between the merry languishing Benedetta and the merry alert Miss Ramus, in her pink dress, with the flaming green gauze veil, and the gleams of gold in hair and gown.

Another beautiful girl, "Miss Vernon as Hebe," now in Warwick House, would have an honoured place in my roomful of fine Romney productions. Well may this charming goddess claim to restore beauty and youth to those who have lost them. Abundant brown hair crowns the pure, untroubled brow; she glides forward, bearing the wine cup, and looking upwards as she advances. As in the Miss Ramus, candour and nobility have here taken the place of the Romney prettiness.

Perhaps it is the curling powdered hair, perhaps the pout of disdain on the lips or the flicker of contempt in the eyes, that gives to "Lady Altamount" (Lady Sligo) the air and very essence of an eighteenth-century aristocrat. This proud and fragile beauty found in Romney, son of a

cabinet-maker, the man who could perfectly interpret her exquisiteness.

Does the large white hat, tied with blue ribbons beneath her chin, that "Miss Cumberland" wears, suit the lady? I think so, and so thought Romney, when this dark-eyed daughter of his friend Richard Cumberland decked herself one day in an old-fashioned hat to amuse her family. Romney happened to call, saw the charm of the decoration, and saw his picture.

When I come upon a portrait of a fragile blonde by Romney, I feel that he is at his best with fair women; when I see one of his bold beauties, such as "Lady Morshead," the tangle of her profuse brown hair contrasted with the simple folds of her muslin fichu, I feel that he is at his best with dark women. This "Lady Morshead," doing nothing, but looking charming; bright-eyed "Mrs. Raikes," playing on a spinet; the dark Cholmeley girls; bewitching Sarah with the ringlets; and the more dignified Catherine—they were painted on Romney's best days.

A few of his "Mother and Child" groups must also have place on the walls of my imaginary room—the "Mrs. Russell," in a green dress at

Swallowfield Park, holding the sash of her small child, who is standing upon a table, back to the spectator, regarding its chubby face in a circular mirror—a happy design this, most natural and winning; the “Mrs. Canning,” seated beneath a tree and clasping her infant to her bosom, but quite conscious that her portrait is being painted; and the “Mrs. Carwardine,” in a high white cap, who is consoling her baby and ignoring the painter—a charming and restful group.

Also the boy “Lord Henry Petty,” at Landsdowne House, a quaint figure in his blue tail-coat and amber-coloured trousers, standing in an affected attitude, with his fingers marking the passage in a book, which he pretends to have been reading. The boy is posing. Romney did not always succeed in suggesting the simplicity of childhood. Even in the famous group of the “Children of the Earl of Gower,” now in the possession of the Duke of Sutherland, delightful as it is, one is conscious that the actions of the children are not spontaneous. Clasping each other’s hands, the lively creatures dance round in a ring, their sandalled feet tripping to a measure

played by Lady Anne upon a tambourine held in the "grand manner" above her left shoulder. This group has been called Romney's masterpiece. The murmur of pleasure that rises to the lips at the first sight of the "Clavering Children" is checked by the feeling that the small boy must eternally and wearily hold his right arm outstretched on a level with his head. So Romney has fixed him, holding high aloft the leash that confines the two spaniels. Otherwise, the group is delightful. The little girl fondles a puppy, her brother's left arm clasps her waist, and the children, conscious that they are being watched, trip forward through the landscape. In another of the large groups, "The Countess of Warwick and her Children," there is something very taking in the small old-fashioned figure of the boy with the hoop, and in the intimate movement of the girl, who is whispering to her listening mother.

The group of "The Horsley Children," so simply painted and so sure, was designed on one of Romney's happy days. George and Charlotte stand on the steps of a garden terrace beneath a tree, in white dresses with blue sashes. In

her right hand the girl holds poppies; in her left a corn-flower.

Two portraits of men I should include in my collection of significant Romneys—the “Warren Hastings,” with its watchful dignity, and the inward smile that flickers on the calm, purposeful face of John Wesley. From the following extract, printed in *Wesley's Journal*, January 5, 1789, I judge that he, like Thurlow, belonged to the Romney faction: “Mr. Romney is a painter indeed. He struck off an exact likeness at once, and did more in an hour than Sir Joshua did in ten.”

No one ever accused Romney of a lack of quickness. He could always begin; he could not always continue to the end.

PLATE VIII.—MISS RAMUS. (From the picture in the possession of the Hon. W. F. D. Smith.)

Connoisseurs in beauty have long disputed as to which is the lovelier of the two Ramus girls painted by Romney. The bow of Miss Ramus' lips may be a thought too precise, but how vibrant she is in spite of her composure! how keen and quick the look of her high-bred face! It would be hard to make a choice between Miss Ramus and Miss Benedetta.



CHAPTER VI

EMMA, AND THE END

THE life of Romney, apart from his paintings, has interested the world in two particulars—his desertion of his wife and his passion for Emma Lyon. This extraordinary woman, the daughter of a blacksmith, began as a nursemaid: she suffered from libertines, loved Charles Greville and lived under his protection, married Sir William Hamilton, became world-famous as the beloved of Nelson, and died in Calais, an exile, where she was buried "at the expense of a charitable English lady."

Romney did not meet her until the year 1782, when he was forty-eight, although it has been suggested that the acquaintance began earlier. Certain it is that Greville brought the lovely girl to the studio in Cavendish Square in 1782, and that, until her departure for Naples in 1789, she was the joy, the light and the inspiration

of Romney's life. Mr. Humphry Ward quotes in his Essay a letter Romney wrote to her at Naples, "astonishing in its orthography." A passage runs: "I have planned many other subjects for pictures, and flatter myself your goodness will indulge me with a few sittings when you return to England—I have now a good number of Ladys of (? fashion) setting to me since you left England—but all fall far short of the Sempstress. Indeed, it is the sun of my Hemispheer, and they are the twinkling stars. When I return to London I intend to finish the Cassandra and the picture of Sensibility." It was during her absence that the dejection darkening his latter years began.

She returned in 1791, and joy revived when she tripped into his studio "attired in Turkish costume." Sunshine again flooded his clouding brain, and the man of fifty-seven writes thus to Hayley:—"At present, and the greatest part of the 'summer, I shall be engaged in painting pictures from the divine lady. I cannot give her any other epithet, for I think her superior to all womankind." Shortly afterwards the painter was plunged into gloom by an apparent coolness, on the part of the lady, but it passed. She again

sits to him, and we read of Romney, the recluse, giving a party in Cavendish Square in her honour: "She is the talk of the whole town and really surpasses everything, both in singing and acting, that ever appeared." Then followed her marriage to Sir William Hamilton at Marylebone Church and return to Italy. Romney and Emma never met again. From Caserta she wrote him a long letter, which shows the innate goodness and sweetness of this beautiful butterfly, who was always pursued, and who was sometimes (not always unwillingly) caught. Here is a passage from that letter of simple self-revelation: "You have known me in poverty and prosperity, and I had no occasion to have lived for years in poverty and distress if I had not felt something of virtue in my mind. Oh, my dear Friend! for a time I own through distress virtue was vanquished. But my sense of virtue was not overcome."

Emma was not only a versatile actress; she was also an artist's model of genius, able to give charm and personality to any character she was asked to assume, and she was shrewd enough to see that there was no surer and more enjoyable avenue to a popular appreciation of

in 1831, Croker's contemptuous query, "What is a Ramsey or a Romney worth now?" shows that the star of Romney was still obscured; but in 1890, at the sale of Long's effects, with the figures of the animals painted in by that artistic surgeon, this same Circe realised 3850 guineas.

Bare-footed, with left hand upraised, she advances from the gloom of the rocks, lit on the left by a gleam of sky and sea. Her dress is pale red, the fillet in her hair and the veil that flows behind are pale blue; but it is the face at which we gaze, the pure, childlike, lovely face whose subtleties of simplicity were revealed to the eyes of her constant lover, so sure that in her he had found the realisation of the artist's dream.

It is difficult to say which of the Romney Lady Hamiltons is the most beautiful. Hard it is to choose between those I have mentioned and the lovely mystery of Sir Arthur Ellis's sketch for the "Cassandra"; or the dark hair hooded in white of "The Spinster"; or the startled eyes "Reading the Gazette"; or the half-length, belonging to Lord Rothschild, seated in pensive

goat that is fading into nothingness; but the dog, leaping and barking at the prospect of a scamper with his pretty mistress, is as lively as the lovely priestess of Bacchus.

Romney's earliest picture of Emma was the "Lady Hamilton as Nature," an attraction, coloured reproductions of varying merit, London print-shops. She is seated before a formal but charming landscape background holding a dog, almost too large for a pet, in her arms. The red dress is cut low, her bright hair is bound with a double green fillet. She is the personification of youth and gaiety, but let the eighteenth-century poet, who sang her praises as "Nature," speak—

"Flush'd by the spirit of the genial year,
Her lips blush deeper sweets—the breath of Youth;
The shining moisture swells into her eyes
In brighter glow; her wishing bosom heaves
With palpitations wild."

So a picture may preserve minor verse.

It is amazing to recall that the full-length "Circe" realised but fourteen and a half guineas at the Romney sale in 1807. Twenty years later